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ABSTRACT

A conception of evaluation is developed which depends upon the self-reflective activities of those most closely involved in the development and teaching of a course. This model is based upon the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, and focuses upon the way participant understandings of a course evolve through the process of critical debate. This evaluation approach capitalizes upon ways of knowing already familiar in the academic context. An attempt is made to demonstrate how the model has been adapted to the unique conditions of the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra, and how it may be adapted for use in wider situations. Particular attention is given to the applicability of the approach to curriculum evaluation situations in higher education institutions. (Author/GK)

CURRICULUM EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

SELF REFLECTION IN A CRITICAL COMMUNITY

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A paper prepared for the Fifth Annual Conference of the *Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia*, Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, Queensland. May 11-14, 1979.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SELF REFLECTION IN A CRITICAL COMMUNITY[1]

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the role of Curriculum Evaluation in Higher Education. A wide variety of models and methods for evaluation currently compete for our attention. Some of these models are limited in scope, focusing too narrowly on student achievement on tests of cognitive outcomes; some are almost entirely attitudinally-based, being concerned primarily to discover whether students have enjoyed or been engaged by the learning experience offered in a course; some require substantial investments of time and thus depend upon the availability of specialist evaluators within higher education institutions and pose certain political problems about the production and distribution of evaluation information to those involved in a course and in the institution more generally. In this paper a conception of evaluation is developed which depends upon the self reflective activities of those most closely involved in the development and teaching of a course.

The model for self reflection is based upon the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas. It invites participants in a course to form a self critical community and to examine the relationship of theory and practice in the teaching of a course and in its substance. The relations of theory to practice and of practice to theory are manifested through the organisation of a course. By making critical analyses of the way theory expresses itself in practice through organisation and of the ways practical problems are registered in organisation posing theoretical difficulties, it becomes possible for participants to gain a concrete and authentic insight into the nature of the course as a learning experience. The model presented here focuses upon the way participant understandings of a course evolve through the process of critical debate.

Since universities already encourage the formation and maintenance of critical communities through their research function, this evaluation approach capitalises upon ways of knowing already familiar in the academic context. Moreover by working simultaneously at the three levels of theory, organisation and practice it avoids the first two limitations of evaluation models listed above, and by involving participants in a course in the self reflective enterprise, it overcomes the third limitation of most current approaches.

The self reflective approach to evaluation has recently been tried in the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra, where a community of Curriculum Developers face common problems and issues related to their work across a variety

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1 A paper prepared for the Fifth Annual Conference of the *Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia*, Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, Queensland, May 11 - 14, 1979.

of curriculum areas. Early experience with the model shows that too rigourous an adherence to its three foci (Theory, Organisation and Practice) tended to make self reflective discussion somewhat rigid and formal; later experience has shown that it can be adapted so that it becomes more problem oriented and better adapted to the convivality of discussion. In the paper some of these practical difficulties are discussed and recommendations made about the organisations of self reflection in critical communities. An attempt is also made to show how the model has been adapted to the unique conditions of the Curriculum Development Centre and how it may be adapted for use in wider situations. Particular attention is given to the applicability of the approach to curriculum evaluation situations in higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in curriculum evaluation in higher education, spurred on, no doubt, by the barbs of an accountability movement which attempts to respond to economic adversity through "rationalisation" of higher education provision and the promises of an emerging technology of evaluation that it can provide the means by which "rationalisation" of -- if not rationality in -- educational provision can be achieved. In such a climate, universities and colleges like the University of Illinois have attempted to preempt the intensification of external evaluation by getting in first with a systematic procedure for University "self-evaluation".[2] In such a climate, university and college higher education research units are increasingly called upon to carry out course evaluations and to assist embattled administrations in making hard choices about the "rationalisation" of institutional offerings. In such a climate, Paul Dressel's *Handbook of Academic Evaluation* (1976) appeared, somewhat ominously subtitled "Assessing Institutional Effectiveness, Student Progress, and Professional Performance for Decision Making in Higher Education".[3]

In such a climate, the oracular, the opportunistic and the officious in higher education research units will find the invitation to play a larger technical-managerial role in the improvement of higher education institutions hard to resist.

The central claims of this paper are:

(a) most curriculum evaluation technologies now being developed are sufficiently narrow in scope to be sharply limited in utility; in consequence they may all too easily become the political tools of autocratic or bureaucratic administrations;

(b) curriculum evaluation in higher education is by no means a new activity, and has already developed convivial processes for course improvement and institutional self-regulation by critical communities of course developers and scholars;

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2 The University of Illinois established a Council on Program Evaluation (COPE) to carry out evaluations of all departments of the University on a five-year cycle, using a combination of internal review and external review mechanisms.

3 Reviewed by the first author for the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (1977, 9, 91-94).

(c) by the systematic development of these convivial processes in the method of critical self-reflection it is possible to achieve the justifiable ends of institutional and curricular improvement without underestimating the complexity of the intellectual and organisational tasks involved or endangering the quality of higher education by replacing academic concerns with administrative ones.

These claims will be defended by a necessarily brief critique of current technologies of curriculum evaluation in higher education, by demonstrating that self-critical and convivial evaluation processes do indeed exist in contemporary curriculum practice in higher education, by outlining a perspective on evaluation and self-reflection which is sufficient for most evaluation purposes in higher education, by describing some recent experience at the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, where we tested the persepctive in practice, and by referring to some of the problems encountered with it and suggesting some directions for improvement.

I CURRENT TECHNOLOGIES

As the curriculum development movement of the 1960's spawned its progeny of evaluation methods and models, the developers of those models and methods began to apply them to their own work as teachers and curriculum developers in universities and colleges. While few of these higher education evaluators regarded measurement of student outcomes (both affective and cognitive) as sufficient for course evaluation, let alone faculty or institutional evaluation, a considerable stress was laid upon these outcomes as indicators of success in course teaching (Costin, Greenough and Menges, 1971). They may be relatively efficiently gathered, they are clearly relevant, and they sometimes suggest how the teaching of a course or the course itself may be improved. The efficiency of such approaches to course evaluation, however, made the technology of measurement appealing as an evaluation mechanism; though limited, it made at least a genuflection in the direction of evaluation as an obligation upon teachers.

The development of instruments for course evaluation demanded a new breed of specialists in higher education: institutional researchers whose task was to provide a technology for course evaluation. Two consequences followed: first, evaluation came to be identified with the technology of instruments, and second, as the institutional researchers recognised the complexity of the evaluation task it became their responsibility to develop the more complex technologies necessary to satisfy the requirements of an expanding role.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that outcomes-oriented approaches are severely limited. Where they focus on student attainment and student attitudes, they ignore many issues of considerable importance in reaching an evaluation of a course (e.g. substantive concerns, teacher satisfaction, resource requirements, the quality of the learning milieu).

Even more important than their limitedness, however, is the question of the relationships between teachers, students, administrators and evaluators that these arrangements created and sustained. Inevitably, they raised questions about control in the production and distribution of evaluative information, and questions about the uses to which such information was to be put (e.g. in decisions about promotion, course improvement, or resource allocation). The independence of the evaluators could not be guaranteed by the "objectivity" of their methods; it also required the development of procedures for handling data which could stand outside the information-flows already serving decisions

about promotion, course improvement and resource allocation. Who were the evaluations for? The students, the teachers, or the administrators? Or perhaps all? These questions were not easily resolved, and they remain thorny ones. (See, for example, MacDonald, 1976, and House, 1976)

What is at stake here is that the emergence of a specialism of institutional researchers and evaluators has created a new battery of technical-political issues in higher education evaluation. In some senses, this makes the issues more tractable because they are explicit. Nevertheless, we will argue that self-reflective processes in evaluation are, for most purposes, superior to evaluation approaches which depend upon "external" evaluators.

It is a mistake to think that the technology of outcomes evaluation was the only approach taken by higher education evaluators. Indeed, some of the most interesting developments of the "illuminative" approach (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976) have been worked out in higher education settings. (See, for example, Miller and Parlett's *Up to the Mark*, a study of the examination game in higher education). But these developments also call for specialist evaluators: "illuminative" approaches are time-consuming and dependent on the availability of experienced evaluation fieldworkers. Not every course, department or institution can release the resources necessary for such evaluation studies.

II "INFORMAL" SELF-CRITICAL APPROACHES

In any course, department or institution, there is always a low but significant level of evaluative activity underway, even when it is not supported by "formal" evaluation studies. This activity is the more or less systematic, more or less public form of self-reflection that accompanies the design and teaching of any course, or the operation of any administrative unit in an institution. This "substrate" of evaluative activity feeds the usual social negotiation processes of course committees and institutional management. It depends upon the self-critical awareness of participants in the institution.

Such evaluative activities are convivial, being based on "natural" processes of social negotiation, deliberation, justification and decision making. And they are inherently political, affecting the conditions of social life of those within and outside the institution. They are essentially practical, being concerned primarily with real courses or real administrative units within the institution, but they are necessarily guided by matters of principle and of theory as these are canalised into the organisational forms of the institution (for teaching, research, public service and administration).

The problems with these informal mechanisms for evaluation are that they are often insufficiently systematic (being based on the resolution of practical problems that actually do arise), insufficiently comprehensive (being guided by moment-to-moment deliberation and decision making rather than by systematic consideration and cross-referencing between matters of theory, organisation and practice), insufficiently rigorous (being based on the vagaries of discussion rather than explicit analysis and systematic observation), and open to abuse (often being unreasonably influenced by individual opinion or political expediency). Nevertheless, such mechanisms are adaptive and evolutionary: decisions taken are open to correction in the light of experience and new forms of organisation of the institution's work can be created to accomplish new tasks. The difficulty is that they are sometimes slow to respond: beachheads of power may be difficult to disperse once they become institutionalised,

suggestions for change based upon student response to a particular course may be hard to accommodate within forms of organisation which exist across the whole institution, and long-term consequences (e.g. the success of graduates in their careers) may be ignored by the day-to-day self-regulatory processes in the institution.

The theoretical problem for evaluation is whether these informal processes constitute a defensible form of evaluation. Then, assuming that they are, the organisational problem for evaluators is how to improve them.

It is our view that these informal mechanisms do constitute a defensible form of evaluation. The characteristic that defines them as such is their self-critical quality. They certainly conform to our own definition of evaluation as *the process of marshalling information and arguments which enables interested individuals and groups to participate more fully and more effectively in the critical debate about a program.*

The organisational problem is to find ways that these informal processes can be intensified to overcome the practical problems listed earlier, while preserving as much as possible of their practicality (and relevance) and their conviviality. In the next section, we develop a perspective on evaluation as self-reflection which may satisfy these requirements.

III EVALUATION AS SELF-REFLECTION IN A CRITICAL COMMUNITY

The approach to evaluation we advocate here attempts, first of all, to overcome the limitedness and political manipulability of many current approaches to curriculum evaluation. Secondly, it attempts to overcome the inadequacies of informal self-reflection listed in the last section. Thirdly, it attempts to capitalise on the existence and experience of self-critical groups in higher education institutions so that evaluation can be more rigorous and yet remain under participant control.[4]

Theory and Practice

Many evaluation approaches are theoretic in character (e.g. the tests and measurements approach, Lindvall and Cox, 1970; the "goal-free" approach, Scriven, 1974; or the "objectives" approach, Tyler, 1949). That is to say, they proceed from theoretical aspirations (either in subject-matter or in terms of the market justifiability of a program) to create an evaluation mechanism for determining shortfalls in a program or its performance. Other approaches are essentially practical (e.g. Stake's "responsive" evaluation, 1975). That is to say, they proceed from the conduct of a program and the perspectives of those in and around it to create an evaluation mechanism which can identify issues and agreements about the program as a justifiable organisation. If we take the aims of evaluation to be the justification of programs and their improvement towards more justifiable forms of organisation, then we inevitably raise questions about the relations between theory and practice in a program.

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4 The approach presented here is based on the critical social science of Jurgen Habermas (1972,1974). It was developed in a doctoral thesis by the first author (Kemmis, 1976) and worked out in procedural terms during a consultancy to the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra in 1978 (Kemmis, 1978). It was implemented as a joint project by both authors at the Curriculum Development Centre, and continues to be used in modified form by the second author.

The process of evaluation, whether theory- or practice-driven, consists of explicating the relations between theory and practice to show how program performance relates to aspiration, how aspirations are justified (e.g. in evaluation of program goals), and how program practice is constrained by the opportunities and the circumstances of the setting in which the program is tried.

There are precursors to this idea. For example, Stake's (1967) "countenance" matrices are especially thorough-going in relating descriptive and judgmental data about a program; its antecedents, transactions and outcomes; and logical and empirical consistencies between these elements. The "countenance" approach is not ordered explicitly around the relations between theory and practice expressed in a program (in aspiration and performance), but these relations are strongly implicit in the approach. Few approaches to evaluation are as comprehensive.

Evaluation models which are theoretic in character suffer from the incompetences of theory: limitations of scope, abstractness, and idealism. Models based on practice suffer from the incompetences of the practical: the problems of reducing multiplex reality to communicable ideas, vulnerability to circumstance, and expediency. Only by developing a model which can contain these contraries is it possible to avoid oversimplification from the perspective of principle (e.g. evaluation as a description of shortfalls between performance and theoretical ideals) or from the perspective of practice (e.g. rewriting program goals so that they can be attained under given circumstances). The present approach does this by projecting the relations of theory to practice into the plane of "organisation", which is in the nature of plans for action guided by principles; i.e., organisation is considered as a concrete and enactable expression of principles which mediates between theory and practice.

Moreover, most evaluation models are guided by a discrete or "enclosed" conception of the evaluation task. It is presumed to finish with a decision or a judgment. They are thus limited by present aims or ideals and by present conditions of operation. Theoretic evaluation approaches often attempt to overcome this difficulty by concerns for generalisation (beyond the conditions of present practice); practical approaches by offering alternative perspectives on the program from which justifications or rationalisations may be synthesised. The present approach attempts to overcome these limitations by organising itself around the evaluation process (self-reflection and debate), and by allowing for provisionality at every level (theory, organisation and practice). It takes an evolutionary stance, seeing the program as adjusting itself to present constraints at each level, yet attempting to become more coherent within each level and between levels. But the drive towards coherence is not merely towards self-justification narrowly conceived (in its own terms, or for limited conditions); it is countered by concerns forced upon it from outside its own development (the wider contexts of theoretical debate, organisational arrangements in society, and practical circumstances). In short, the program is never isolated in its justification of its work, and justification is never a once-and-for-all matter. The present approach begins from the assumptions that programs and their justifications are time-dependent and evolve through time, and that they are contextually-embedded.

Higher education institutions already encourage the formation of critical communities through their research and academic teaching functions. And in every field, understanding evolves through the systematic testing of relations between theory and practice (e.g. in experimentation, observation, the systematic collection of historical records, or testing of resilience of ideas by argument).

In every field, organisations exist for public examination of these theory-practice relations (publication of research reports, professional conferences, etc.). Curriculum evaluation in higher education, by encouraging the development of critical communities around the curriculum functions of the institutions, can capitalise on the familiarity of staff with these processes and create the conditions for reflexive development of the work. (Such processes are surely assumed in any argument for academic freedom.)

The self-reflective approach

In curriculum development and evaluation, theory, organisation and practice are always interrelated. A curriculum is guided by theoretical principles, expressed in organisations for teaching and learning, and manifested in practice in real settings. Different principles apply in considering a curriculum at each level. (These are summarised in an Appendix to this paper.) Theory develops by research and scientific discourse; organisation by planning and the flexible implementation of plans in the light of circumstance; practice develops in learning by doing and from mistakes.

Organisations for curriculum express theoretical and value commitments about social action, and are modified both in the light of developments in theory and in the light of practical problems in implementation or changes in circumstance. Theory develops partly according to its own internal principles, but also by being expressed in organisation and tested in practice. Practice is guided by theoretical principles and organisational constraints, but the point of theory and of organisation is that they may control the purely circumstantial process of trial and error.

Furthermore, each level has its own distinctive "real-world" context which influences it, and these influences flow on to the other levels. Theoretical ideas develop through discourse in critical communities of researchers; organisations interact with other organisations and within wider social, administrative and legal frameworks; practice is constrained by local conditions. Through such mechanisms, contextual concerns "seep in" to a curriculum-in-action.

In considering these as part of a comprehensive evaluation enterprise, it is necessary to operate with different principles at each level. But within the evolutionary perspective of the approach, it is possible to say something about the three levels in general. Problems in programs arise as problems of inflexibility or intransigence on the one hand, and as problems of the unbridled proliferation of alternatives on the other. The first set of problems arise because organisation, theory or practice remain unchanged in the light of changed circumstances; the second set of problems arise because of a drift towards incoherence, organisational instability, or uncoordinated action.

In evolutionary terms, organisations adapt themselves at every level by the generation of variants and processes of selection among variants. The aspiration to greater awareness creates new or variant ways of thinking, organising and acting; the aspiration to coherence or self-regulatory control creates a tendency to suppress new ways of thinking, organising or acting. The self-reflective process consists in negotiating between these tendencies in the service of both increased awareness and increased control or coherence. This is achieved differently at each level.

Organisation is in the nature of plans. It is expressed in strategies, blue-prints for action, routine management and control operations, working relationships expressed as roles and links between roles, and the like.

Since organisation is about plans, we may think of it by analogy with law which evolves both at the parliamentary level and by precedent in common law by a more or less self-regulatory process. Taking the parliamentary aspect of the analogy, we may say that organisation evolves by legislation and amendment. New prescriptions for and proscriptions against action are enacted as laws which provide guidelines for action. In the light of experience, they may be modified by amendment. Legislation "organises" action, and new legislation appears as a phenomenon of the generation of variant forms of organisation. Experience exerts a selective function on these variants, and leads to amendments. In this sense, legislation and amendment is a systematic evolutionary process.

Theory is about ideas. It is expressed in theoretical propositions, statements of curriculum rationales, statements of individuals' understandings, aspirations, values and beliefs, and the like.

Popper (1974) discusses the evolution of scientific knowledge in the language of "conjecture and refutation". Toulmin (1972) gives a rather less formalistic treatment of the evolution of knowledge, and one which overcomes some of the problems of seeing knowledge as evolving purely formally; by contrast, Toulmin demonstrates the power of critical communities in the evolution of knowledge. Nevertheless, Popper's phrase is apt, and will be retained here. New or variant ideas are conjectured by researchers who attempt to refute or disconfirm them through research programmes (whether experimental, as in science; interpretative, as in history; or analytic, as in philosophy). Conjecture and refutation thus appear as twin variation and selection processes in the evolution of theory.

Practice is about action. It is evident in the work itself, expressed in the activities and forms of life of participants in the work.

At the level of practical action, variation and selection appear in the process of trial and error. Systematically pursued (i.e., by acting in a spirit of experimentation), trial and error can become a systematic evolutionary process.

In a "living" curriculum, these processes naturally interrelate. Self-reflection, as an evaluation process, is the systematic attempt to interrelate them.

This whole set of relationships might be expressed in the following schema:

Insert Figure 1 here

Figure 1 expresses the general outline of relationships which must be considered in critical self-reflection. The task of the evaluation enterprise is to identify these relationships, to discover problems within and between levels, and to stimulate the generation of potential solutions.

Within the schema, it can be seen that theory modifies organisation by the influence of conjectural principles on legislated forms of organisation; organisation modifies theory as amendments to organisation suggest refutations

of conjectured principles. Organisation modifies practice as legislated forms of action prescribe and procribe trials in action; practice modifies organisation as errors or failures of action suggest amendments to legislated forms of organisation.

The links between theory and practice are indirect; as has been suggested, they are mediated by organisation. (Theory and practice "speak different languages", as it were; organisation, whether in research or social action, mediates between them, making them "comprehensible" to one another). Nevertheless, it is as well to note the apparent relations between them: theory modifies practice through the apparent relation of conjectured principles to trials in action; practice modifies theory through the apparent relation of errors or failures of action to the refutation of conjectured principles.[5]

An example

In carrying out an evaluation according to the principles outlined here, it becomes immediately apparent that an enormous intellectual and analytic task is imposed on any critical community bold enough to embark upon systematic self-reflection. What is at stake here is not the ultimate impossibility of the task -- it engulfs huge realms of human knowledge and social principle -- but the ultimate indefensibility of any alternative. In short, if evaluations must always be limited, then they should be limited and open rather than limited and closed. The approach denies evaluation models which would make any absolute or transcendental claims about the justifiability of programs, and evaluations which claim that all justifications must be tailored to present circumstances (rationalisations). It raises questions to be considered, recognises their contextual and historical embeddedness, and urges those involved in the reflective process to go further in their analyses and observations. Most of all, it urges those involved in a program to set out their principles, their plans, and their practice so that they are available for reflection.

Imagine a university biology course. Just to raise some of the issues involved in the approach, consider the kinds of theories upon which it depends: theories of knowledge of the particular subject-matter (e.g. evolutionary theory), of curriculum and pedagogy (teaching and learning, etc.), and social theory (ethics, ideology, political economy). These are all expressed in the organisation of the course: its processes of justification and the structure of arguments presented in the course; the organisation of the subject-matter-to-be-presented (in reading, lectures, practical work, etc. -- the specific contents of the course); the arrangements made for teaching and learning and the use of supporting resources (e.g. lectures, practical work, tutorials, library work, assignments and examinations); and the organisation of teacher-student, teacher-teacher, student-student and other social relationships (concerning, for example, notions of teachers' authority, students' rights, the role of administrators, and the like). And these in turn may be related to specific forms of activity in practice: the conduct of argument and justification in the course; the specific contents actually studied; the nature of lectures, practical sessions, and the other component parts of the course; and the specific social relations which come to exist between specific individuals.

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5 A range of other considerations should be considered against the background of this framework. Some are touched upon in the summary of principles appended. Still others, like the social theory they imply, must be discussed in a future paper.

Figure 2 mentions these relationships without further explication, but could readily be expanded on the principles expressed in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The second main claim of this paper is that reflection of this kind already goes on in higher education institutions as courses are informally evaluated by those who participate in them in one way or another, and that self-reflective meetings already exist where such matters are discussed. The third claim of the paper is that these discussions could be intensified and improved by making these meetings more systematic: by explicating these kinds of relationships, observing more closely, by recording, and by acting in a spirit of experimentation.

The task cannot be comprehensively performed given the real constraints on time, social context and participation in a course. Using the approach, the schema, and the principles it employs, however, it may be possible to extend the range of issues to be discussed in evaluating a particular program within the limits of time available, the social context of the course, and the people most directly affected by it. In short, the approach demonstrates what thorough justification would be like and invites interested parties to participate in relevant discussions without closing them off through a technology of evaluation. It is, if you like, a plea for reasonableness -- for "rationality as reasonableness", to use Weir's (1976) term -- in the face of contemporary climate for evaluation based on rationalisation (in both its economic and its intellectual senses).

IV SELF REFLECTION MEETINGS IN THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (CDC)

Background information on CDC

The Curriculum Development Centre was established in 1975 to develop school curricula and school educational materials at the national level. In order to perform this function the Act establishing the Centre empowered CDC to

- undertake research
- publish materials
- collect, assess and disseminate information.

The professional staff of the Centre reflects these functions and consists of people with training and experience in educational research and evaluation, teaching, selected curriculum subject areas, information services (library work and computerised data banking), administration and educational publishing. Thus there is a considerable diversity of professional abilities and functions which have to be brought together in various combinations to work on curriculum projects.

Developing common understanding of the work of the Centre, its underlying philosophy and concepts, methods of working (particularly the ways of working cooperatively with the education systems and schools) and the practical problems which delineate and constrain programs, is essential to effective team work within the Centre.

The organisational arrangements for any one project are generalised Figure 3. As is evident from Figure 3, the structure provides the opportunity for numerous meetings and widespread discussion of any aspect of a project.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Theory

The proposal that CDC adopt the method of self-reflection for its internal evaluation was put forward at a general staff meeting at the end of June, 1978. The central thrust of the proposal was that CDC should view itself as a organisation that learns from experience and gradually builds up increasing understanding of and competence in curriculum development processes. As a aid to deliberate fostering of the collective learning of CDC, as opposed to the individual learning that inevitably takes place on the job, self-reflective meetings were to be held. The discussions in the meetings would use the concepts of theory, organisation and practice and the interaction between these as the basis for analysis and assessment. The idea was to hold a series of meetings in CDC's program areas (the areas where developments are underway) and to trace the development of programs over a period of time. At intervals, wider staff meetings would be convened to look at the main findings from individual discussion groups and thus foster the development of the Centre staff as a organisation that learns.

If that was the *theory* behind the self-reflection program, what of its *organisation* and *practice*?

Organisation

The organisation was essentially simple. Three people with a background in evaluation (Ed Davis, Clare Hughes and Stephen Kemmis) would offer to convene meetings on programs and projects at the request of other CDC staff. One of these people would act as chairman and in the initial experimental meetings all of us would participate to gain experience in the process. The chairman would start the meeting by describing the use of the concepts of theory, organisation and practice as the basis for analysis.

In order to keep work to a minimum, record-keeping was to be quite informal. Each member of the group was asked to note down points which he considered important. All the notes were collected and filed as raw data - no writing or typing up. Meetings could also be recorded and the tapes kept for reference. For future meetings, one member of the group would look at the file and summarise key issues as seen by the group at the time. In that way it was hoped that on-going view of the development of the project could be maintained.

Practice

What actually happened?

Ten meetings have now been held on the following topics:

Language Development Project,

Curriculum Information Project,

Expressive Arts Project,

Small-scale grants,

Mathematics education,

Bibliographies,

Dissemination,

Library services,

Publications,

Core Curriculum program.

The list appears to display an immediate weakness - no program has been discussed more than once. However, this should not be taken as indicative of failure. One reason for the lack of on-going meetings about programs is that events move slowly and evaluation of ideas and changes in organisation and practice take time and reappraisal is not needed frequently. The second reason is the wide scope for discussion of projects generally. In some cases, steps have been taken partly as a result of the self-reflection meetings to set up structures within projects to continue this function; in others, existing structures have been better used. The accumulation of experience is taking place through the involvement of staff in discussion of a number of projects rather than through on-going analysis of one program. Continuing analysis of individual programs and recording of program evolution may come in time.

The first three meetings were held on an experimental basis. At that point, about half of the members of staff had been involved in self-reflective meetings and continuation of the meetings was offered as service to the Centre by the Studies and Inquiries section. Despite favourable comments on the initial meetings there was a total lack of response to the invitation -- a not altogether surprising outcome in an organisation which has had a record of being unable to sustain any system of staff meetings, formal or informal.

In the light of favourable comment from participants in the initial meetings, we were reluctant to see a potentially good idea lapse. We therefore looked for issues which seemed to be of importance to CDC and the second author convened two more meetings, one on small scale grants and one on bibliographies. These two meetings went particularly well; partly because all the people at the meetings were involved in small scale grants activities and in compiling and using bibliographies (though in different programs) and had not discussed the topics before, and partly because it was possible for the second author, who chaired the meetings, to analyse fairly clearly at the start of the meetings what the concepts of theory, organisation and practice might mean in those areas.

The last three meetings have been at the request of other members of staff, which represents something of a breakthrough. It seems that the discussions are being used to some extent as preliminary problem solving devices in that staff are seeking to clarify their ideas and obtain the views of others in a non-hierarchical situation before moving into the more formal decision-making structures of the Centre. Beyond that, the discussions are serving a felt need to exchange ideas on issues and processes common to a number of projects.

While generally the focus has been those concerns which are under the control of Centre staff, discussions have ranged into the wider areas of the function of CDC as a national organisation, the setting of priorities for the Centre and CDC decision-making processes.

The theory of self-reflection in an evolving organisation as expounded earlier in this paper seems too grand and too ambitious, to describe the relatively modest activities that have taken place in CDC. Yet it still seems essentially sound. Ideas have evolved and affected the organisation and practice of the Centre. Understanding of what we are about has been enhanced. The most effective meetings have been those in which specific aspects of theory, organisation and practice have been analysed or in which one level has been selected out for particular attention. Practice has shown, however, that there is a need for one person, or a small group of people, to be responsible for the organisation of the program of self-reflective meetings. This person must generate meetings (and thus has to be in a position to identify topics of general concern and interest) and respond to requests from members of staff. The program needs to be provided with impetus, and to some extent to be driven, or in a busy organisation it will lapse.

V REFLECTIONS

Experience with the self-reflective approach suggests that too rigorous an adherence to its analytic categories (organisation, theory and practice) makes it cumbersome. If analyses at each level were too detailed, discussion became rigid, formal and self-conscious. In order to retain the conviviality of discussion, it was necessary to relax its analytical strictures and allow discussion to rove rather more loosely around the three foci. Discussion also seemed to be improved when the approach was introduced in such a way as to encourage explorations of ideas at each level -- these could be refined as experience with the approach accumulates.

Discussions also seemed to be improved when they began from organisation and led from there to discussions of practice and theoretical principles. On the whole, identifying theoretical principles and analysing theoretical questions remains the most difficult analytical task.

It is clear from the meetings held, however, that they do not provoke the defensive reactions usually associated with evaluation: these were disc ussions, often stimulating and insightful ones, between communities of individuals who were concerned with the improvement of programs of common interest and with their justification. But because the conversations were among constructively critical colleagues, they were often penetrating.

A major problem is that the meetings have not yet generated well-articulated justifications across the analytic categories. It is perhaps too early to expect that. But the records actually collected, while they are suggestive, are by no means adequate. The approach begins by asserting the value of discussion and debate; at worst, it may end in a talking-shop. But here, too, there is room at least for hope: participants have felt better prepared after self-reflective meetings to justify their programs publicly (e.g. to meetings of the CDC Council), and there is some evidence that they have influenced project or program documents. This is encouraging, because the approach is predicated on the idea that justification of a program is not a once-and-for-all matter, and that it develops along with the program itself.

Higher education institutions already engage in self-reflective activities of the kind envisaged by the approach. It is unlikely that course-based self-reflection would be very much more rigorous than was the case for CDC. It might be possible, however, to improve the rigour of discussion at the theoretical level -- indeed, higher educationists are often acutely aware of

theoretical issues (as, for example, in debates over students' rights, the structure of knowledge in disciplines, and the proper pedagogy in courses). Whether these concerns can be interrelated, or whether they can be related to organisation and purely practical considerations remains to be seen.

On the one hand, constraints of time and interest in self-reflection seem to suggest that the approach, as outlined here, is too comprehensive and too analytically-detailed to be practical; on the other, it is clear that the theory and organisation of self-reflection will need to be still further explicated. It is our hope that it can be modified in the light of its own principles, and more effective forms for the organisation of self-reflection discovered. It s perspective offers a coherent approach to analysis of theoretical issues at stake in a given curriculum, and a way of generating and synthesising observations of its practice. It may thus contribute to the process of critical debate about programs among participants in the communities of interest they create.

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APPENDIX : SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES FOR SELF-REFLECTION

A. The principles in general

Aim :	Improvement: living with greater awareness and greater self-control. (Assumptions of autonomy and responsibility of individuals, free commitment to joint action by fair negotiation between participants and consensus about the negotiation processes.)
Problem-Sources:	Intransigence/inflexibility (stability in the face of changed circumstances); unbridled proliferation of alternatives in relatively stable or benign circumstances.
Method:	The dialectic; acting in a spirit of experimentation by thinking critically about real problems (concrete negation); generating solutions within the limits of individual ability, the capacity of the organisation, and the limits of understanding, and trying them out with an eye to their implications within and across levels.
Criteria:	Critical awareness and democratic control.
Content:	The work of the institution conceptualised as an evolving organisation which takes seriously its commitments in organising work, developing sound theory/rationale and developing sensible practice.
Context:	Democratic society, critical communities, communities of self-interest.

B. Organisation

Aim:	Improvement of organisation by making it more authentic and more appropriate.
Problem-Sources:	Intransigence of present forms of organisation; inflexibility; proliferation of new ways of working when procedures are already available; problems of diminished sense of participants' control.
Method :	Legislation and amendment; forward planning and flexible implementation in the light of principles and circumstances. The method is concretely developed in : (a) description of present organisational structures, (b) identification of problems in organisation itself and in relation to theory/rationale and practice, and (c) generation of potential solutions and testing them within organisation and in relation to theory/rationale and practice (acting in a spirit of experimentation).
Criteria:	Authentic insights in the organisation of enlightenment, authentic consensus about the organisation of the work.

Content: Strategies, work-plans, blueprints for action, routine management and control operations, working relationships and structural arrangements (e.g. in organisational charts), etc.

Context: Content of institutions, laws, regulatory procedures.

C. Theory/rationale

Aim: Improvement of theory/rationale through increased internal and external consistency; increased intellectual control over the work.

Problem-Sources: Intransigence of present theory/rationale; blind commitment of theories, values; proliferation of theoretical statements or commonsense understandings without systematisation; incoherence; romanticism; abstraction; irrelevance.

Method: Conjecture and refutation; argument and research. The method is concretely developed in:

(a) formulation and expression of theory/rationale,
(b) formulation and consideration of issues through analysis, research and relationships with organisation and practice, and
(c) generation of potential solutions to problems testing them within theory/rationale (internal consistency and in relation to organisation and practice (external consistency).

Criterion: True statements (justified true belief reached through scientific discourse).

Content: Theoretical propositions; statements of rationale; statements of participants' understandings, aspirations and values.

Context: Context of theory, scientific discourses, debate, justification and negation among critical communities.

D. Practice

Aim: Improvement of practice through better adaptation to working conditions and contexts of action; adaptation to theory/rationale, and organisation; acting with greater wisdom and prudence; adaptation to the purposes of participants and achieving free commitment to the work.

Problem-Sources: Intransigence and conservatism of present practice; undisciplined proliferation of alternative ways of working (without regard for the coherence of the work); tendencies to act arbitrarily, purely opportunistically, or purely reactively.

Method:	Trial and error; learning by doing and learning from mistakes. The method is concretely developed in: (a) recounting and reviewing activities, (b) identification of problems, failures, mistakes, both within practice and in relation to theory/ rationale and organisation, and (c) generation of potential solutions and testing them in practice (internal coherence) and in relation to organisation and theory/rationale (external coherence).
Criterion:	Prudent decisions.
Content:	Action: the work itself; forms of life and activities of participants.
Context:	Circumstances and opportunities presented by particular situations.

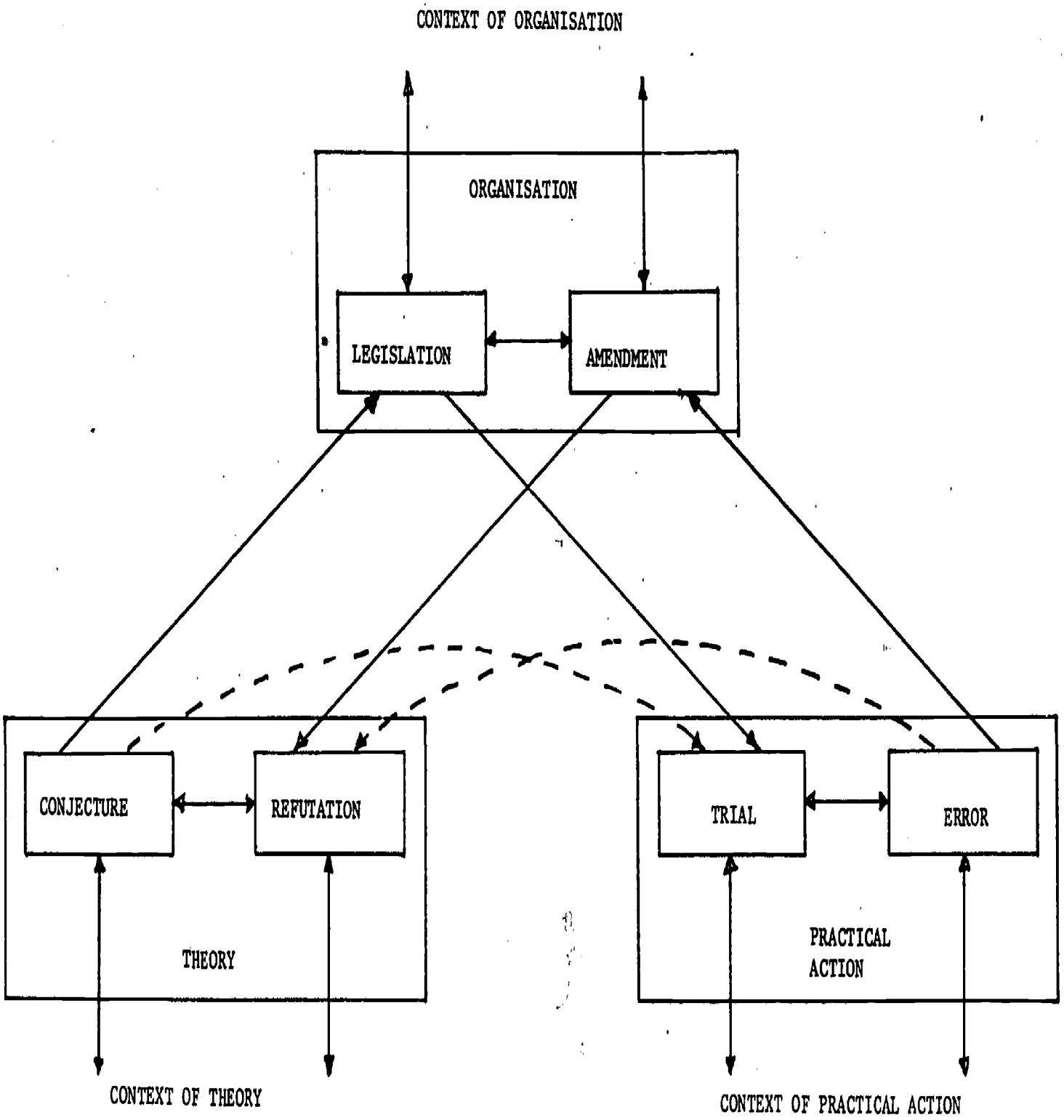

Figure 1: Interrelationships of Organisation, Theory and Practical Action in an Evolutionary framework.

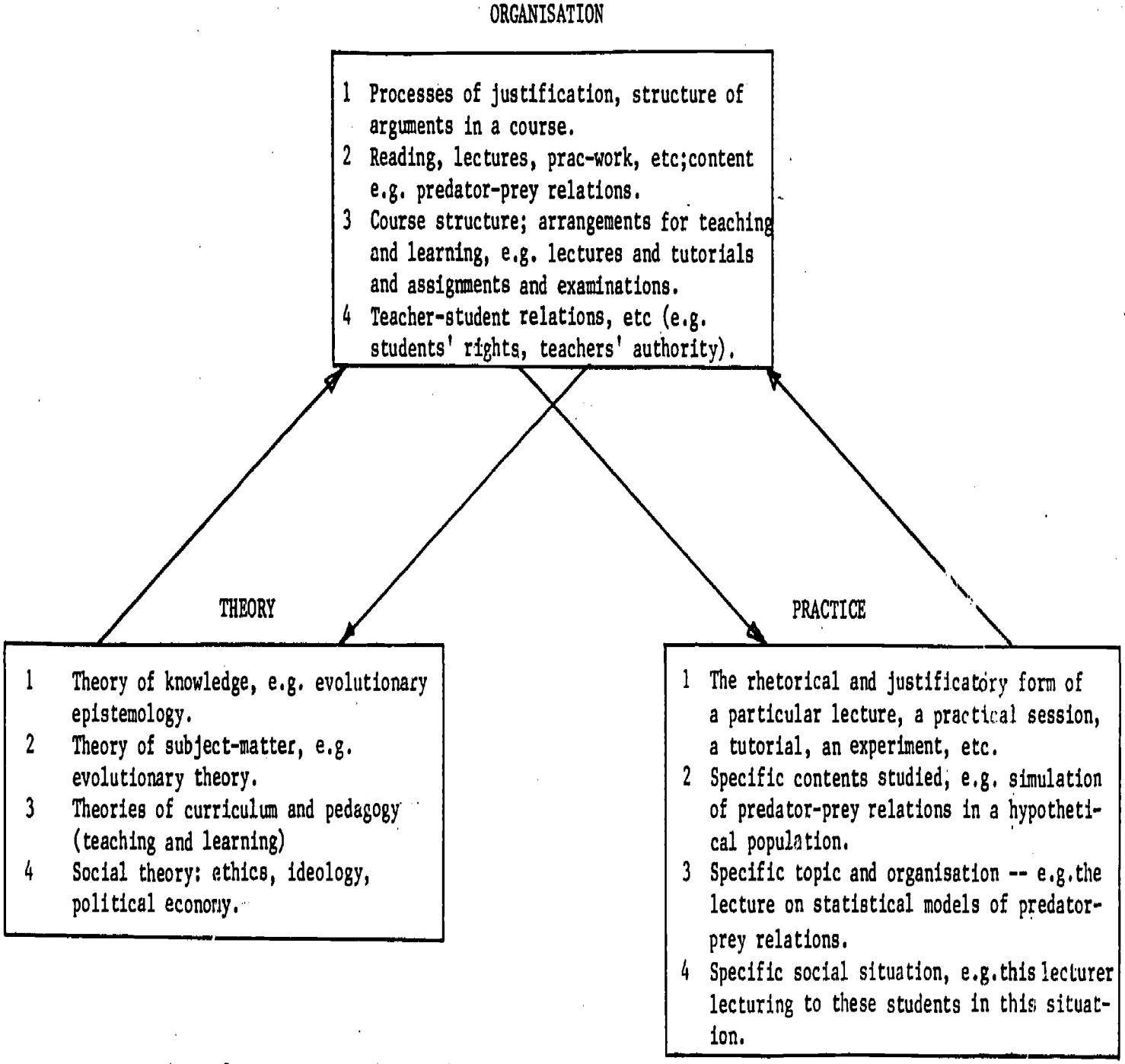

Figure 2: Some interrelations between organisation, theory and practice in an imaginary biology course.

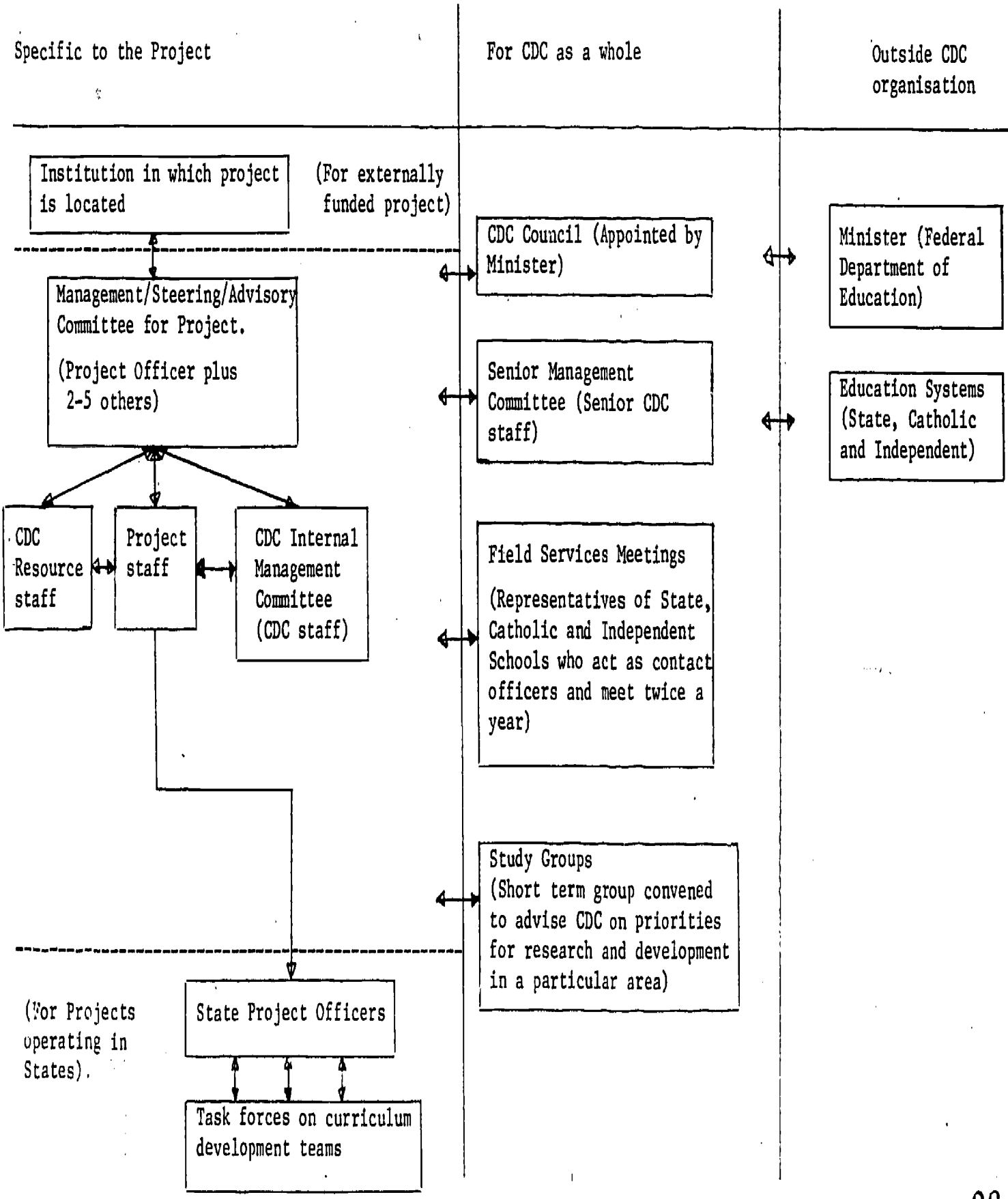

Figure 3: Organisational Structure for a project.

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

Dr. Stephen Kemmis is interested in curriculum research and evaluation, and the methodology of research and evaluation generally. After initial training in educational psychology at the University of Sydney, he went to the Centre for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for graduate work. He later became a Senior Research Associate in the Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia, where his interests were extended into the politics of curriculum research and evaluation. On returning to Australia, he became an evaluation consultant to the Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra. He is now Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Studies at Deakin University, Victoria.

Dr. Clare Hughes is a graduate of the University of London. Her research field was biological chemistry. In Australia, she taught for twelve years in Canberra schools then moved into educational administration, working on a variety of tasks in the Commonwealth Department of Education. She is now Assistant Director (Studies and Inquiries) at the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Canberra, and is responsible for evaluation and research related to ongoing CDC programs.